

In Memoriam—David Richard Crockett '42

He was a compassionate soldier and talented actor

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On October 2, 1942, Lt. David Crockett was en route to Great Britain aboard the converted ocean liner HMS Queen Mary. Life with his new bride, Dorothy Jasper Crockett '42, would be postponed until the end of World War II.

While zig-zagging to avoid German U-boats, the massive Queen Mary inadvertently struck an escort cruiser, HMS Curacao. Cut in half, the Curacao sank within minutes. Ordered not to stop because of the U-boat threat, the Queen Mary steamed on, the 15,000 soldiers aboard watching helplessly as the Curacao's men struggled in the

water. Ultimately about 108 men were rescued by another escort ship; approximately 338 drowned. It was a tragedy Crockett never forgot, and was among wartime memories he kept to himself until near the end of his life, says his daughter, Julianne Scarks '84.

Although he enjoyed Italian opera performances, skied in Alsace-Lorraine, and visited famous European monuments during leaves with the 5th Army Antiaircraft Artillery, Crockett also expressed sadness remembering the war's destruction of businesses and irreplaceable art. He had compassion for the war's devastating effect on the homes and farms of ordinary citizens, too. From their conversations before he died of congestive heart failure on November 17, 2013, it was obvious that "he had been mulling a lot of things over for a lot of years," says Julianne.

Discharged in 1946, Crockett worked for Crockett's Dairy Farm, a family venture in New London, N.H., and later became a comptroller at Sanders Associates in Nashua. In retirement he started a custom carpentry business and worked into his mid-80s.

He and Dorothy shared a lifelong interest in theater. At UNH she worked behind the scenes; he acted and became president of the Mask & Dagger society his senior year. Later, the couple joined several small theater groups, with Crockett relishing his favorite roles as Hamlet and Henry Higgins.

He also loved music, says his daughter, Beth Stepancik '71, and while at UNH had often hitched rides to Boston to hear the big bands play. He made up songs off the top of his head and entertained his children with his acting skills. Stepancik has a warm childhood memory of watching an early television production of "Peter Pan" with him. "I was very excited about all the flying," she says. Sharing her exuberance, when the performance was over, her father picked her up and "flew" her off to bed.

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